

Summary/Final Minutes – Work Session – March 21, 2013

Savannah City Government SUMMARY/FINAL MINUTES MAYOR AND ALDERMEN WORK SESSION March 21, 2013 – 10:00 am

PRESENT: Mayor Edna B. Jackson, Presiding
Alderman Van R. Johnson, II Mayor Pro-tem
Aldermen Tony Thomas, Chairman of Council
Alderman Mary Osborne, Vice-Chairman of Council
Aldermen John Hall, Carol Bell, Alderman Mary Ellen Sprague
Tom Bordeaux and Estella Shabazz

Acting City Manager Stephanie S. Cutter
City Attorney W. Brooks Stillwell

Mayor Jackson called the meeting to order.

Mayor Jackson recognized all the city employees who helped build and decorate the float for the City Council members, read personal acknowledgement letters, thanked the volunteers present at the meeting and everyone involved for all their exceptional work on the float project.

Fire Training and Recruiting Update

Chief Charles Middleton provided an update of the Savannah Fire Department's recruitment efforts and gave an overview of the hiring process which included the written exam and the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT).. The presentation examined recruitment and retention of women in the fire service, the recruit class of 2012, recruitment activities, and 2013 firefighter trainee applicants charted by gender and race. Also covered were women in the fire service, resistance from various elements in the workforce, institutional barriers, and immediate, short and long term goals of the department. Chief Middleton introduced Daniel Stowers, the new Emergency Manager, who is back with the Fire Department after a five-year absence.

Assistant Chief Scott discussed recruitment and retention of women in the fire service. He stated that this is a nationwide issue and though the national average is at 17 percent, the city of Savannah is at 3 percent. Assistant Chief Harris reviewed recruitment activities and stated they are utilizing job fairs and the Heroes Hiring Veterans campaign. The department also plans to visit college campuses and military bases as part of their recruitment plan. He then introduced Heather Hilderbrand, Sr. Analyst, Employment Services in Human Resources who has been assisting the Fire Department with their hiring process. She gave an overview of the written test and the CPAT stating that the written test is given monthly and information regarding the CPAT is on the website. She stated there was only one written test for 2008-2009 so the testing history was incomplete for those years and there was no physical ability test (CPAT) given in 2011. She presented slides on recruitment testing history for 2010, 2011 and 2012, those hired in 2013 as well as recruitment comparison, recruitment testing history by gender and race, and firefighters hired by gender and race.

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Alderman Osborne applauded their hiring efforts, really appreciated the higher numbers, and said they should keep up the good work. Alderman Bordeaux asked if any conclusive factors had been established from the 2013 numbers and was concerned with the disparity between white and black men passing the test and getting hired. Ms. Hilderbrand said as of now it has not changed and what they contribute to a higher passing rate is applicants try a little harder. Chief Middleton responded that they are constantly trying to strike a balance in how to recruit and do testing. They have been more aggressive and have been receiving better candidates.

Alderman Bell inquired about college recruitment and Acting City Manager Stephanie Cutter stated the City plans to become more aggressive with their recruitment efforts. Alderman Shabazz commended the Fire Department and personnel on their recruiting and hiring efforts acknowledging that she had been very critical at their previous presentation to Council. Alderman Thomas commented that the congressional sequestration provides an opportunity for the City to recruit those getting laid off. Alderman Johnson stated that firefighters are generational which provides incentive to seek out that occupation. He also felt that adding EMS would be advantageous to the City and would boost female staffing. Mayor Jackson commented on test taking skills and the disparity issue, and stated that during the recent meeting in Atlanta the Lieutenant Governor was very supportive. Acting City Manager Stephanie Cutter acknowledged two former firefighters, Ron Butler and Stanley Moses who expressed interest in recruitment efforts for the department. Alderman Shabazz inquired about the Cub/Boy Scout Explorer Program. Chief Scott stated that activity with this project has been sporadic, but going forward they have every intention of doing a better job and becoming more involved with this program.

Digital Billboards

Lewis Warren of Adams Outdoor gave an overview of his company and asked City Council members to consider modifying the existing ordinance for digital billboards by removing the nonconforming requirement and eliminate the cap to level the playing field. Alderman Osborne stated she doesn't want Savannah to look like Las Vegas and Alderman Sprague stated that Savannah is a historical city which places it in a different category; she is not in favor of changing the current ordinance. Alderman Thomas is also not willing to alter the current ordinance, and stated that Lamar Advertising, who is the largest of these firms, attended a previous meeting on this topic and no one representing the smaller firms came to that meeting or communicated wanting any changes to the ordinance. Alderman Bordeaux inquired about the reported revenue generated by these billboards. Alderman Hall thanked the prior Council for cleaning up the smaller billboards, especially in African American neighborhoods. He also stated that he wants to become more knowledgeable about it and requested a copy of the ordinance. Mayor Jackson asked Ms. Cutter to provide a copy of it to Alderman Hall. Alderman Shabazz stated that these billboards are very distracting to drivers and she is also against changing the ordinance. Mayor Jackson stated that a lot of work was done on this issue and they were very diligent and fair. She also stated that they cannot vote to change what was previously done, but there appears to be general consensus that the ordinance issue not be reopened.

Homeless Issues and Homeless Assessment Review

Dr. Jerry Silverman, primary consultant for the Chatham-Savannah Homeless Authority presented an overview of the executive summary. Dr. Silverman led an assessment starting in

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April 2012 along with consultant Mary Willoughby resulting in a report consisting of 2 volumes. The report looked at institutional and administrative issues confronting the Chatham-Savannah Homeless Authority using the formative approach and continuum of care. He described the funding process stating that Savannah and the surrounding areas are federally mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and that HUD approves and provides the funding but does not allocate or distribute the monies.

Alderman Shabazz asked if there had previously been an equitable distribution of these funds, and Dr. Silverman stated the clear finding is that there remains a status quo – what was given the previous year is what the entity will receive from the next allocation. He also noted that there wasn't an assessment made of the quality of each program receiving funds, and stated that the financial problems are an indirect result of fundamental disfunctionalities that cause many other issues.

Mayor Jackson requested Ms. Cutter and her staff to provide recommendations on moving forward. She also commended Ms. Cutter on her monthly reporting of expenditures for transparency purposes, and Alderman Shabazz thanked Ms. Cutter for her outstanding leadership. The Mayor and Council all agreed that Dr. Silverman's report has given them a springboard and foundation to start this reform.

Council broke for lunch

Acting City Manager Stephanie Cutter presented the City Manager's Briefing of the agenda items for the Council Meeting of March 21, 2013. The agenda is attached and made a part of the permanent record.

Mayor Jackson adjourned this meeting.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Dyanne C. Reese", written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Dyanne C. Reese, MMC, Clerk of Council